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do so in the interest of a higher and not of a lower ideal,—that it is the human will, in its effort after fuller self-expression and not mere individual caprice, that finds itself hampered by its present form.

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## THE MORAL AND ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF THE ANCIENT ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION.

THE moral and ethical code which a people sets up for itself, and the way in which it lives up to this, may be taken as a sort of thermometric register by which the social, physical, and spiritual condition of the nation can be judged. The history of the ancient race of Iran affords a fair illustration of this truth; and the moral status of Persia throughout its earlier history, including the mighty empire of the Achæmenian kings and the sovereign sway of the Sasanian rulers in early Christian times, will briefly here be sketched. It is the lessons of the past that teach the wisdom of the present and the future.

In order better to understand the moral and ethical code of Zoroastrianism, however, a few words regarding the nature of the religion itself may be given by way of introduction. The devoted believers in this early faith, worshippers of light as they are sometimes termed, paid pious devotion to the great god Ormazd, or Ahura Mazda, as he was called, and by creed they were the faithful followers of Zoroaster. This was the Prophet of Ancient Iran, whose clarion voice of reform rang out over the land six centuries or more before the birth of the Christ, or many years previous to the time when the Jews were carried up into captivity at Jerusalem, or the gentle Buddha preached to thirsting souls of India the doctrine of salvation from misery through renunciation. A characteristic tenet of the old Zoroastrian creed was Dualism. This dogma recognized the existence of two primeval spirits, Ormazd and Ahriman, the Good and the Evil, whose influence pervades the world. The incessant warfare and constant struggle of

these primordial principles is evinced at every turn in human life. This cardinal doctrine is one of the hinges on which the entire system of Zoroastrian ethics turns. The moral and ethical law of this creed is based, indeed, upon a systematic theory of morality and is founded on philosophic principles. A contrast may be aptly drawn between India and Iran with regard to the effect produced on each nation by the working of its respective philosophic ideas. The ancient Iranian, by influence of his creed, is characterized by action, exertion, and practical views of life; the Indian, in the development of his religious faith, became a creature of inaction, of introspection, and of meditation. The Hindu, with his pantheistic speculations, ended in the Upanishads in quietism; the Persian, whose sacred books ring with the call of "up and doing," like a valiant soldier girt with the armor of faith, was summoned to fight boldly the good fight in the mighty struggle between the warring powers of good and of evil. As a prime factor in the dualistic tenet of the contending kingdoms of Ormazd and Ahriman, as taught by Zoroastrianism, we must recognize the great doctrine of the freedom of the will. This article of the religion forms the basis and foundation of the ethical and moral part of Zoroaster's religious system. Man is Ormazd's creature, and by birthright he belongs to the kingdom of good; but, created as a free agent, he has the right to choose. Upon that choice, however, his own salvation and his share in the ultimate triumph of good or of evil in the world depend. Every good deed that man does increases the power of good; every evil act he commits augments the kingdom of evil. His weight thrown in either scale turns the beam of the balance in that direction. Hence, man ought to chose the good. It is to guide him in this choice that Zoroaster believed himself to be sent. This is the great teacher's mission. How far he succeeded in fulfilling that mission must be judged from the character of the faith that this prophet of the Magi founded, and from its effect and influence in ancient days, if the kingdom of Media, of Bactria, of Persia, in fact, the whole of Iran, has stood for anything in the world's history.

As a second important element in the general ethics of the religion, we must notice the doctrine of man's responsibility to account. A strict watch over each man's actions was believed to be kept by the divinities. All good deeds were carefully recorded; all sinful acts were sternly set down. No doctrine of a recording angel could be clearer and more precise than this of the Zoroastrian creed. Whether these actions were written in a Life-Book, or whether they were heaped up to be weighed in the balance when the soul was placed on the judgment scale after death, as the later development of the religion taught, it is not necessary here to decide. Allusions to such a record, account, or weighing are often found throughout the sacred books of Zoroastrianism from the earliest days to latest times.

To pass from the general to the particular, however, the quintessence of the moral and ethical teachings of Zoroaster may best be summed up in that doctrinal triad, so familiar to every reader of the Avesta, "good thoughts, good words, good deeds." In the original text these words run as *humata, hukhta, hvarshta*. The brief triad of this article of faith forms the pith and kernel of the ancient Prophet's teaching. "I practise good thoughts, good words, good deeds; I abjure all evil thoughts, evil words, evil deeds," is the watchword of the faith, the ever-recurring phrase in the sacred liturgy, the note on which constant changes are rung from the period of the Gāthās, or Zoroastrian Psalms, to the latest recorded utterances of the religion. Good thoughts, good words, good deeds, gathered together respectively, form the three mansions or stages through which the soul of the righteous man ascends in onward steps after death into the infinite light (*anaghra raocāo*) of heaven. Evil thoughts, evil words, evil deeds are the grades through which the spirit of the damned falls to endless darkness and perdition. In the Avesta, the man who practises this triune doctrine of the holy faith is the *Ashavan*, or "righteous;" he is the man who lives according to the Law of Righteousness, as opposed to the *Anashavan*, or "wicked man," the *Dregvant* or follower of Falsehood.

Space does not permit of cataloguing the virtues and duties.

that are inculcated and enjoined, or the vices and faults which are denounced as to be shunned. The virtues may be comprised, in general terms, as purity alike of body and soul, uprightness, charity, generosity, and benevolence; and no people are more renowned, perhaps, for their princely generosity to-day than are the Parsis or Modern Zoroastrians of Bombay. In addition to these good qualities, the ancient creed laid particular stress upon the faithful keeping of one's word and pledge, the avoidance of all deceit, especially of lying, and the importance of keeping out of debt, as well as of shunning theft and robbery. According to Herodotus, the Persians taught their sons three things,—these were “to ride horse-back, to use the bow, and to speak the truth.” And next to the sin of lying they considered it the greatest disgrace to be in debt, because, beside incurring many other evils, this fault implied also an additional evil, the necessity of telling lies, “for a man who is in debt,” says Herodotus, “must of necessity tell lies.” In the magnificent Old Persian rock-inscription of the great king Darius, there is hardly a line that does not emphasize this mighty monarch as the foe to duplicity and the lover of truth.

Connected with the spiritual side of the Persians' education was also the side of physical obligation, the duty of out-door exercise, which played a prominent part in the theory of youthful bringing up. In the conduct of life, moreover, from the very beginning, the importance of maintaining soberness and chastity was not lost sight of, although the ideas may have been somewhat more lax than would be to-day. Incontinency, sexual excesses, seduction, abortion, and unmentionable sins are evils that are strongly denounced in the Avesta; the outcast woman is anathematized. But it must be remembered that among the ancient Iranians, polygamy and concubinage were doubtless the rule, or at least they were not uncommon. The Persians appear to have drunk wine freely; still, the vice of intemperance seems to have been severely punished, if we may judge from some classical allusions to the subject; and Strabo speaks of the Persians as being moderate in most of their habits. It is true that no Brahmanical asceti-

cism was practised in ancient Iran, and, as the Avesta shows, the Zoroastrian religion allowed a wholesome and whole-souled enjoyment of life. The family was the unit in the state, and a large family of children was a virtue rewarded by the king as a bulwark to the throne. But with all this, in the oldest days, temperance, discretion, restraint, and a certain self-control seem in general to have been a racial characteristic. The whole tone of the Avesta, for example, and of the Pahlavi writings is exceedingly chaste. The position of woman in ancient Iran was apparently in nowise inferior to her standing in the Vedic times of early India. As among other oriental nations, however, submission to her lord and master is taken for granted, and the woman who is "obedient to her husband" comes in for a special meed of praise in the Avesta and elsewhere; but it is perfectly evident, as a rule, there was not that subjection which results in loss of personality and individuality. The Zoroastrian scriptures plainly show this fact.

Among general virtues, also, a feeling of national pride was cultivated, as we gather from the Avesta and from classical authors. Submission to those in civil and religious authority was insisted upon. Contentment, industry, courage and valor, love of wisdom and of knowledge—all were instilled; and reverence for the divine power and practice of religious rites and ceremonies were strictly enjoined. In short, we may find in the Zoroastrian moral and ethical code almost every article of our own duty towards God and duty towards our neighbor.

Among the various special rules that were rigidly enforced by the ancient Persian faith during its entire history may be mentioned those that were designed for preserving the purity of the elements, earth, fire, and water, and for freeing these from defilement, especially from pollution arising through contact with dead matter. It was the rigid observance of this law, doubtless originally in part a sanitary precaution, that so markedly characterized the Zoroastrian belief in the eyes of antiquity. In carrying out these prescriptions in daily life, however, not a few were the practical difficulties and predicaments that arose, as the Greek and Latin writers and the Persian scriptures themselves tend to show. Equally praiseworthy

in the eyes of modern times would be the Zoroastrian duty of preserving and fostering useful animal life, especially of giving care to the cow and to the dog, for both these animals were of importance to an early pastoral people. But this freedom from injury to animal life was carried to no absurd extreme, as among the wretched Jains of ancient India. The Zoroastrian creed taught that it was especially meritorious to destroy noxious animals, like serpents, toads, rats, and vermin. By destroying these evil creatures, the power of Ahriman is reduced and the kingdom of Ormazd is expanded. Expiation for faults and atonement for sins might in this way be effected, as is indicated in the Avesta.

Throughout all ages, the Persian faith upheld the practice of "the good deeds of husbandry" (Avesta), of irrigation, of agriculture and of farming occupations, as opposed to the wild nomadic life of the marauding mountaineers. The parks of the Persian kings have been famous from time immemorial, and the few Zoroastrians that are left to-day in their old Iranian home are employed chiefly in gardening and in peasant life; although their Parsi kinsmen in India have been drawn principally into mercantile pursuits. Each class in the constitution of the Zoroastrian state and in the different walks of life—the priest, the warrior, the husbandman, and the craftsman—had its own moral obligations to fulfil and its own particular duties incumbent upon it to perform. The reform of Zoroaster was in part a social reform as well as a religious and ethical reaction.

The ideal picture must not, however, be overdrawn. There was a darker side as well as the bright side. This cannot be denied. Millennial days come not at once with a reformer. It cannot be gainsaid that certain practices existed, were overlooked, or recognized, which to-day would meet with general social ostracism. The list, moreover, of sins, vices, and faults that were prevalent was no meagre one, as a glance at a passage in that Dantesque vision of hell, seen by the saint Arda Viraf, will show. Some of the offences there recorded—like walking barefoot, lamenting excessively over the dead, or the offence of a woman's performing her hair-dressing over the

fire—strike us as trivial; while the enormity of other sins may appear to us to have been underrated. But in general the Zoroastrian standard was a high one; a strain of idealism flowed in Iranian veins. A certain custom, however, which was undeniably practised with religious zeal by the worshippers of Ormazd, is in our eyes incestuous. This was the practice of next-of-kin marriages. Whatever may be the meaning of the much-discussed word *hvaētvadatha* in the Avesta, or of *khētāk-das* in the Pahlavi patristic writings of Sasanian times, there can be no doubt that marriage among relatives, even between parents and children, brothers and sisters, occurred among the Iranians from the earliest ages. It doubtless originated in part from a desire of preserving the unity and perpetuating the religious strength of the faithful community. It is needless to add that such shocking marriages as those within the first degree of kinship would not be tolerated by the modern Zoroastrians, nor have they been for centuries.

It must be allowed, also, that a few grossly ignorant superstitions worked their way into the faith, which to our mind were not without unfavorable influence upon the moral and ethical stamina of the people; and certain unpleasant customs were recognized, or at least were not deemed improper, which meet with disapproval in our sight. It must likewise be acknowledged that the ancient Iranians did not shrink from cruel practices, and from inflicting horrible punishments; but in most cases these were done, it must be remembered, with a distinct purpose, to deter from national crimes or to punish great offenders. Other nations of antiquity have not acted in a manner much different. Mercy was a virtue inculcated by the Avesta. It cannot be denied, finally, that with the decadence of the Achæmenian dynasty the moral tone of Iran was weakened by the wave of luxury and voluptuous indulgence that swept over the land between the Tigris and the Indus, carrying away the ethical bulwarks of the people and swallowing up those sterling traits of the hardy mountain race that had made Persia under Cyrus the mistress of Asia. But to offset this, it must be added, the faith contained within itself



the sovereign remedy against dissolution ; and in the opening centuries of our era, under Sasanian rule, the pristine glory of Zoroastrian Iran once more returned in all its majesty, until Persia sank before the rising power of Islam, on the day when the Mussulman conquest wrought a change, or rather a revolution, in the religious spirit and national character of the Iranian folk.

Taken for all in all, it may be said that no better proof of the real merit of the Zoroastrian creed as a working hypothesis can be found than is illustrated in the character of those who profess the faith to-day. These are the community of the Parsis in India, religious exiles from Iran since the days of the Mohammedan invasion, and the small remnant of Zoroastrians that still survives in Persia. Together they number hardly one hundred thousand souls, and of these nearly ninety thousand reside not in the land of their birth but in the neighborhood of Bombay. They are the living exemplification of the true worth of the doctrines taught by the ancient Bactrian sage. They piously uphold the best of the tenets of the old faith with regard to religious observances ; they live in love and charity with their neighbors ; their life is marked by temperance, soberness, and chastity, and their fame for acts of liberality and generosity is world-wide. Among them there is no practice of polygamy ; they are strict monogamists ; unfaithfulness to the marriage vow is almost unknown ; and prostitution among Parsi women is hardly to be found. The horror of falsehood, duplicity, and of debt is as keenly felt by the Parsis to-day as it was over two thousand years ago. Or to conclude, if we take the Zoroastrian religion in its entirety, and view it in the light of the early period to which it belongs, we shall come to the conviction that outside of the light of biblical revelation it would be hard to find among the Gentile nations a higher standard of morality, a nobler code of ethics, than that set up by Zoroaster to be maintained by the ancient people of the Land of the Lion and the Sun.

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